



Freedom and responsibility go together: Personality, experimental, and cultural demonstrations [☆]

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ABSTRACT

In three cross-cultural studies we tested the premise that psychological freedom (aka autonomy) and personal responsibility are complementary rather than conflicting, and the further premise that freedom causes responsibility, rather than vice versa. In all studies, (a) supporting autonomy in an experimental context increased responsibility-taking after failure, whereas emphasizing responsibility did not; (b) measures of dispositional autonomy and dispositional responsibility were positively correlated; (c) and responsibility-taking was slightly lower in Russia, a country typically ranked lower in world freedom indices. Supporting a control sensitivity explanation of the socio-cultural differences, the last study found that Russians were inclined to take *more* responsibility than Americans, but only when it was requested (not demanded) by family/friends (but not by authorities or by strangers).

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1. Introduction

“Freedom means responsibility.”

[George Bernard Shaw]

“Freedom makes a huge requirement of every human being. With freedom comes responsibility.”

[Eleanor Roosevelt]

“Freedom of will is the ability to do gladly that which I must do.”

[Carl Jung]

“The price of freedom is responsibility, but it is a bargain, because freedom is priceless.”

[Hugh Downs]

These familiar sayings converge in the idea that freedom is a desirable psychological good, one that is worth paying a considerable price for. They also converge in the idea that this price often involves acting responsibly vis-à-vis others; in Jung's words, free-

dom comes with inescapable social obligations, paradoxically seeming to limit freedom. Despite the paradox, the quotes also converge in the idea that there is a positive and perhaps self-reinforcing association between freedom and responsibility; when there is more freedom there is also more responsibility, and where there is less freedom, there is less responsibility. The main purpose of this article is to unpack these deceptively simple ideas. We hope to determine whether freedom and responsibility really do “go together,” and if they do, whether one is causally prior to the other. We also test contextual and cultural factors that may limit or enhance the development and expression of both freedom and responsibility.

1.1. Definitional issues

1.1.1. Freedom and autonomy

First it is necessary to define what we mean by freedom and responsibility, because these are complex concepts with long histories of usage. “Freedom” is a personal and/or social good that can be conceptualized in political, philosophical, scientific, ethical, and psychological terms, and/or in terms of liberty, autonomy, free will, individualism, and more. In psychology, freedom has been studied in many ways, including in the context of reactance theory (Brehm, 1989), in the context of the free will versus determinism debate (Wegner, 2002), in the context of experimental and priming

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